



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January 20, 2005

Mr. Jim Thompson
General Counsel
State Board of Educator Certification
1701 North Congress Avenue, 5th Floor
Austin, Texas 78701

OR2005-00612

Dear Mr. Thompson:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 217598.

The State Board for Educator Certification ("SBEC") received a request for copies of the Examination for Certification of Educators in Texas ("ExCET/TEExES") tests taken by the requestor and the answer sheets completed by the requestor for those tests. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.110 and 552.122 of the Government Code. You also state that you notified National Evaluation Systems, Inc. ("NES"), an interested third party, of the request and of its right to submit arguments to this office as to why the information should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (determining that statutory predecessor to § 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception to disclosure under Public Information Act in certain circumstances). We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹ We have also considered comments submitted by NES.

¹ We assume that the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

Section 552.122(b) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure test items developed by a licensing agency or governmental body. In Open Records Decision No. 626 (1994), this office determined that the term "test item" in section 552.122 includes any standard means by which an individual's or group's knowledge or ability in a particular area is evaluated, but does not encompass evaluations of an employee's overall job performance or suitability. Whether information falls within the section 552.122 exception must be determined on a case-by-case basis. Open Records Decision No. 626 at 6 (1994). Section 552.122 applies where release of "test items" might compromise the effectiveness of future examinations. *Id.* at 4-5; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 118 (1976). Additionally, when answers to test questions reveal the questions themselves, the answers may be withheld under section 552.122(b). *See* Open Records Decision No. 626 at 8 (1994).

In this case, we agree that the submitted ExCET examination questions are protected "test items" that "measure the skill, knowledge, intelligence, capacities, or aptitudes of an individual" and are a "standard means by which an individual's or group's knowledge or ability in a particular area is evaluated." Open Records Decision No. 626 at 6 (1994). Thus, SBEC may withhold the ExCET examination questions, which we have marked, under section 552.122(b). *See* Open Records Decision No. 537 (1990). However, we determine that release of the test's cover page, instruction sheet, mathematical formulas, and the requestor's answer sheet completed by the requestor would not reveal questions that are test items for purposes of section 552.122(b). Thus, SBEC may not withhold the test's cover page, instruction sheet, mathematical formulas, or the requestor's answer sheet from disclosure under section 552.122(b).

Section 552.110 protects the property interests of private persons by excepting from disclosure two types of information: (1) trade secrets obtained from a person and privileged or confidential by statute or judicial decision and (2) commercial or financial information for which it is demonstrated based on specific factual evidence that disclosure would cause substantial competitive harm to the person from whom the information was obtained. With respect to the trade secret prong of section 552.110, we note that the Texas Supreme Court has adopted the definition of trade secret from section 757 of the Restatement of Torts. *Hyde Corp. v. Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d 763 (Tex.), *cert. denied*, 358 U.S. 898 (1958); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 552 at 2 (1990). Section 757 provides that a trade secret is:

any formula, pattern, device or compilation of information which is used in one's business, and which gives him an opportunity to obtain an advantage over competitors who do not know or use it. It may be a formula for a chemical compound, a process of manufacturing, treating or preserving materials, a pattern for a machine or other device, or a list of customers. It differs from other secret information in a business . . . in that it is not simply information as to single or ephemeral events in the conduct of the business A trade secret is a process or device for continuous use in the operation of the business. . . . [It may] relate to the sale of goods or to other

operations in the business, such as a code for determining discounts, rebates or other concessions in a price list or catalogue, or a list of specialized customers, or a method of bookkeeping or other office management.

RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b (1939). In determining whether particular information constitutes a trade secret, this office considers the Restatement's definition of trade secret as well as the Restatement's list of six trade secret factors. *Id.*² With respect to the commercial and financial information prong of section 552.110, the exception requires a specific factual or evidentiary showing, not conclusory or generalized allegations, that substantial competitive injury would result from disclosure. Gov't Code § 552.110(b); *see* Open Records Decision No. 661 (1999). Neither NES nor SBEC claim that the submitted information is a protected under the commercial and financial prong of section 552.110(b); therefore, we will address only your claims under the trade secret prong of section 552.110.

Both SBEC and NES contend that the submitted information is protected as a trade secret under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code. Upon review, however, we determine that neither SBEC nor NES has adequately explained how the test's cover page, instruction sheet, mathematical formulas, or the answer sheet completed by the requestor amount to a trade secret. *See* Open Records Decision No. 552 at 5 (1990) (party must establish *prima facie* case that information is trade secret), 542 at 3 (1990). We therefore conclude that the submitted information may not be withheld under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code and must be released to the requestor.

We note that the test's cover page, instruction sheet, mathematical formulas, and answer sheet are protected by copyright. A custodian of public records must comply with the copyright law and is not required to furnish copies of records that are protected by copyright. Attorney General Opinion JM-672 (1987). A governmental body must allow inspection of copyrighted materials unless an exception applies to the information. *Id.* If a member of the public wishes to make copies of materials protected by copyright, the person must do so unassisted by the governmental body. In making copies, the member of the public assumes the duty of compliance with the copyright law and the risk of a copyright infringement suit. *See* Open Records Decision No. 550 (1990).

²The six factors that the Restatement gives as indicia of whether information constitutes a trade secret are:

(1) the extent to which the information is known outside of [the company]; (2) the extent to which it is known by employees and others involved in [the company's] business; (3) the extent of measures taken by [the company] to guard the secrecy of the information; (4) the value of the information to [the company] and [its] competitors; (5) the amount of effort or money expended by [the company] in developing the information; (6) the ease or difficulty with which the information could be properly acquired or duplicated by others.

RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b (1939); *see also* Open Records Decision Nos. 319 at 2 (1982), 306 at 2 (1982), 255 at 2 (1980).

You also ask this office to issue SBEC a previous determination regarding ExCET test items. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(a) (allowing governmental body to withhold information subject to previous determination); Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001). We decline to issue a previous determination for ExCET test items at this time.

In summary, SBEC may withhold the information we have marked under section 552.122(b) of the Government Code. SBEC must release the remaining information to the requestor in compliance with copyright law.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

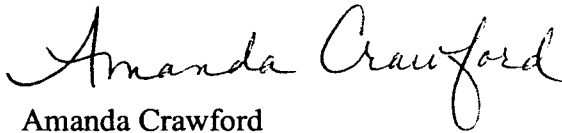
If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be

sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amanda Crawford".

Amanda Crawford
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

AEC/sdk

Ref: ID# 217598

Enc. Submitted documents

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